

AND BY THESE DEEDS—

Drawings by W. Pryor

BY ROY NORTON



"I'm goin' to see that this old Sandy Claus gets off his beat and finds this flat!"

WILLIAM SKAGGS turned impatiently in his bed, then snored again, until the sound that had disturbed his rest repeated itself, coming plaintively upward through the thin flooring of his room. This time he sat up angrily and scowled at the skylight. A faded, battered old curtain that he habitually drew across it before retiring to rest permitted a slit of strong sunlight to filter through the dirty panes above and down to the bare floor, where it lay like a bar of gleaming, burnished silver, and Skaggs' eyes wandered toward this as if fascinated, and observed the exact crack on which it rested.

"It's only three o'clock," he grumbled somewhat resentfully, as if the slit of light was a sundial, with whose markings he was familiar. "If this wa'n't such a safe, comfortable home, I'd get out of it. Them kids of the widdle's'll sure drive me nutty some day."

He burrowed beneath the worn blankets of his bed, and pulled them up over his ears in an attempt to shut out the crying from below. The cracked pitcher, on the rickety washstand in the corner, caught a reflection of light on its glazed belly that assumed the appearance of an eye rather sardonically watching the bed. Up in the apex of the irregular ceiling, the room being an attic made over, a spider imperturbably resumed the hopeful construction of a web that was to be a masterpiece, stretching from one angle of loose, dingy, torn wall paper to a rafter that had become exposed. The one chair in the room, once a decent caned-bottomed chair, but now frayed and ragged, seemed patiently waiting for Skaggs to rise and support his wardrobe, with which it was draped; but the occupant of the bed resolutely tried to sleep once more, feeling the need of rest.

Skaggs' business was such that it kept him out nights, and that and a certain shrinking modesty made him desirous of avoiding publicity as enhanced by the daylight glare. He was a burglar by trade, second stories being his specialty, and among those fellow craftsmen who knew his calling was regarded as a "grouch" and a "loner," because he invariably worked without partners, and was so thrifty that he did not even drink—which in itself, in a man of his ability, was almost criminal. Other men might come and go,—to prison,—but Skaggs, like the brook of the song, seemed able to "go on forever"; only he was not "light and free," with his habits nor his money, having the laudable ambition to save and accumulate enough to go into some other business where he was entirely unknown; the saloon business, for instance, or some other gentlemanly calling.

The Skaggs domicile, rented to him by the hard-working merchantess, Widow Callahan, who had a very

nice apple stand near the Battery, was not particularly warm on that December day; but a natural craving for free air rendered the sleeper's muffled blankets insupportable, and with a grunt of disgust he threw them off and ran a bare arm over his stubbly face.

"There it goes again!" he said as the wail once more smote his ears, and then scrambled out of bed with some impolite remarks directed against his luck in general and all young human beings in particular.

He jerked the cord that worked his curtain, and was pleased to note that it had not snowed since he retired, for snow was something that interfered with his business, and then, more widely awake, relieved the chair of its burden, and thoughtfully proceeded to wash and shave. He utilized a piece of cracked mirror tacked to the wall and bordered with tissue paper in frills; not because he had not at times possessed better ones, some of them with solid gold or silver frames, but because he had made it a rule to have nothing about the place that some envious person might claim as his own. And while he was making his toilet there came at intervals that same disturbing cry from below.

"Must be," said Skaggs to himself, "that there's somethin' wrong with one of the widdle's kids. Reckon I better go down and see."

HE opened the door from the attic chamber and descended a short flight of narrow, creaking stairs, planked in, and giving egress to the top hall by another door. The smell of garlic, onions, cabbage, and beans that was wafted upward through five flights below told that some of the tenants were going to feast on vegetables; but Skaggs wasted no time from his mission, and opened the door at the end of the hall whence he had heard the cry of distress.

Lying in the bed was the widow's youngest, Mary Kathleen, wailing with full three-year-old lung power, and Skaggs looked in vain for her customary keepers, Louisa Agnes, a motherly old lady of seven years, and Patrick O'Malley, a pugnacious gentleman of five.

"Holy Moses, Kid! What's eatin' you?" demanded the lodger, standing by the side of the bed that at night served as resting place for the entire Callahan family.

Eliciting no reply beyond a louder wail, Skaggs looked helplessly round for a moment, wondering what course should be pursued, and then seemed to recall something from past observation. He poked a big, stubby finger downward, and dug it into Mary Kathleen's ribs, and shouted, "Kitchykoo! Kitchykoo!"

In sheer amazement she stopped crying and removed a pair of grimy little fists from her eyes that she might

have a good look at the disturber. She recognized him as the lodger through whose door she had sometimes crept, before tumbling into the areaway and being strapped with braces by a large, grave man with whiskers who lived at the public dispensary round the corner.

"What's the matter, Kid?" again asked Skaggs, with what was meant to be a charming smile, but looked just what it was, an ex-convict's grin. "Got the tummy ache or somethin'?"

"Sandy Claus!" promptly howled Miss Callahan.

Skaggs scratched the hair on his head, bristling and coarse through much prison cutting, and looked perplexed; but he must make conversation of some sort to end this mournful yowl.

"Oh, yes," he said, "he sure is an all right guy, this Sandy Claus. I wish—say, don't make so much fuss. Wait! Hold on a minute: I'll tell you a story. It's about this Sandy Claus. He's a—maybe he'll come here, all right."

Mary Kathleen promptly subsided, and eyed him questioningly.

"Where's Lou and Pat?" demanded Skaggs, ignoring the promised story, inasmuch as he was one of the few burglars at large who was not a fiction writer.

"Gone to see Sandy Claus," whimpered Mary Kathleen, her lips trembling with envious sorrow, and Skaggs discovered for the first time that they were very sweet baby lips, and felt an unusual sensation somewhere under his heavy ribs.

"Oh, I see," he said, scratching his chin this time. "Give you the rinkydink, did they, so's they could go and bat their eyes through the window? I'll bet the old woman'll give 'em blazes when she hears on it. 'Tain't right, nohow, leavin' a poor little cuss like you here all alone."

He sustained a sudden throb of pity for Mary Kathleen Callahan, lying there in bed all day with the cruel braces on her back. He squirmed a little as he thought of strait jackets he had filled once or twice in his career, and wondered if "them iron things ain't a heap worse." He was tempted to remove them; but decided that the doctor who put them on knew his business, just the same as he; Skaggs, knew his. Maybe the doctor was just as expert in his line. Skaggs hoped so. He was not allowed much time for rumination; for the young lady insisted on the promised story, and, be it to Skaggs' credit, he did his best.

ONCE on a time," he said, "the' was a girl kid just your size and just like you that got hurted, and she was doin' time, the same as you, and says 'My! I wisht I had a diamond tararum!' And so she prayed for it, because that's what the settlement worker told 'em all to do when they wanted anything at all. But her maw didn't have no money, and was workin' in a boiler factory; so it looked as if this here pore little kid was due to be bunked. But—let me see. I most forgit that story, Kid. Oh, yes! Her wicked sisters went off and left her to come in a coach with glass slippers, or somethin' like that, and she give 'em the hooks for fair, and ran away with the other young lady's husband, and got the glass after all. And now she's a very grand lady that works in the chorus. Ain't that some story, eh?"

Mary Kathleen seemed a little mixed on it, and threatened to ask distressing questions; so he said:

"Gee! Guess I better take another whack at it!" and boldly plunged into another yarn; but he was very thankful when the door burst open and the missing adventurers burst in with excited tales of things to be seen through the department store windows, against which they had gleefully and longingly scrubbed their noses until driven away by the heartless watchman.

Skaggs sat on the edge of the bed to listen to these rapid-fire stories, and grinned, and was suddenly abashed when something warm and soft burrowed into his big hand as if for love and protection, and discovered that it was the dirty little fist of Mary Kathleen. His fingers closed over it very gently, lest he crush a thing so weak and tiny, and he impulsively let loose a mighty oath; but the Callahan kids didn't seem to mind, for in that part of the city that swarmed around them such were common.

"I'm goin' to see," said Skaggs, with grim humor, "that this old Sandy Claus gets off his regular beat this year and finds this flat. Most always, I reckon, he gets his list of kids out of Bradstreet's or Dun's; but this year he'll make one side trip, or I'm a mutt!"

Never was there such an audience as his. He was flattered by its attention, and his imagination soared as it had not done since the time he found himself safe from pursuit with a star actress' hundred-thousand-dollar rope of pearls in his hands. Not that he thought of that feat, for its unpleasant sequel was that the pearls

were actually worth just three dollars and ninety-nine cents; but now he turned himself loose telling what Santa Claus might bring to this fifth flight up. There would be wonderful toys,—things that run when you wound 'em up; things that would fly round the room like Glenn Curtiss in his machine; things that would crawl like a snake, but were harmless; dolls that could talk and sing, and play tunes in their little insides.

And so, fancy free, the burglar made himself charming because a chubby hand was in his, and because he felt sorry for anyone in a strait jacket made of steel.

LATE that night he sallied forth from his room. As he hurried through the shopping crowds he wished that he was a "dip" for the time being, there being many plethoric pockets abroad in the course of emptying themselves. Straight away to the west he bore, as undeviating as a hawk in pursuit of prey; but keeping a cynical, wary eye to right and left from habit, although feeling comparatively free from danger because, as he bravely asserted to himself, "The bulls really have nothin' on me right now," although they might watch any man who had been "mugged." Skaggs was intent on doing an unusual thing. He was going to draw money and go shopping, just like other folks, and was filled with a glorious, intoxicating, Christmas spirit.

At intervals, for years, he had intrusted his savings, blackly gained, with a former cellmate who had reformed, and now, having dropped somewhat from grace, threatened to become an Alderman. Snugly reposing in the big safe, in the luxurious office, back of the magnificent saloon owned by his friend, Skaggs knew there should be a package containing more than three thousand dollars in beautiful green currency. It had been Skaggs' invariable rule never to call upon his friend or to appear to know him in the street, lest he compromise his distinguished fellow townsman. His only visits were those when he came to deposit a little more with the hoard of which his friend took kindly charge. A distressing feature of safety deposit boxes is that one must preserve a key. With such a friend as Blink Hawkins one required neither key nor receipt. "Blink's all right! He is!" was a phrase of the Decalogue in the world where Skaggs had his being—and, let it be noted, this was the gospel for those who lived between darkness and dawn.

The big electric light sign, automatic, that displayed in red, white, and blue globes the legend, "Blink's Place," flashed in Skaggs' face as he whisked round a corner. It disappeared, and a snake of fire squirmed upward along the corner of the building, an inadvertent warning to the thoughtful, and a terror to those long bibulous ones who had been striving to find what Omar Khayyam meant; but Skaggs, full of Christmas spirit, heeded them not, and collided with some who were more than filled with Christmas spirits as he opened the swinging doors. He glanced inside, and decided that it would be better to retreat and seek a side door, where again he collided with others, frowsy children, bareheaded old dames, and mere working men, carrying away their happy Christmas cans.

BLINK was not in sight, and Skaggs, with his cap pulled low over his heavy black eyebrows, made his way to the office in the rear, looked carefully to see if anyone was observing him, and stepped through the portières.

A burly man in shirt sleeves was seated at the desk with his back turned, but wheeled round at his visitor's entrance and stared at him. Skaggs had a slight palpitation of the heart at sight of a hereditary enemy, Police Captain Meggs.

"Wh-wha-what you doin' here, Cap?" he demanded, weakly, fighting against a desire to run.

"Bless my soul! If it isn't my old friend Slick 'Bill!" said the man. And then, in a reassuring tone, and with a most friendly, ingratiating smile, "But you don't need to look fussed up, Bill. I'm off'n the force. Bought this place out. Glad to have you drop around and see us."

"Bought it?" queried Skaggs with sudden depression. "Where's Blink?"

"Why, ain't you heard?" asked the new proprietor. "He croaked more'n a month ago. I bought this dump from the public executor. He didn't have no heirs, Blink didn't."

Skaggs abruptly leaned toward Meggs, and his voice

was almost tearful and husky as he asked, "Say! Didn't you find no package in the peter with my name on it?"

The former police official leaned back, and so much appreciated the joke that his "little round belly wabbed like jelly" as he roared out his mirth. He even banged the open desk with his fat hand and threatened to run a cadenza of cachinnations.

"But, say," he said, when he saw Skaggs grow white and lean weakly back against the imitation mahogany partition, "you ain't in earnest, are you, Bill?"

The burglar nodded weakly.

"Naw, the' wa'n't nothin' here for you! Of course not, you big crook!" the ex-officer snarled, with a complete and belligerent change of attitude. "You come around here and try to start somethin', and I'll have you framed and sent over!"

Skaggs suddenly let out a loud "Ha! Ha! Got you that time, Cap!" and in his turn seemed convulsed with laughter over his own joke.

Meggs swore it was a good one, and that the drinks were on him; but Skaggs' hand trembled as he gulped a full glass of raw liquor over the bar, and then slid quietly out into the night. He was far too wise to complain or have trouble with the police. He had trouble enough, anyway.

BLINK, he said, looking up at the stars as he sat dejectedly on a bench in Union Square, "Blink, old boy, don't think I'm layin' it up to you. You wouldn't double cross me! It was the bulls that done it. They



"Please don't take Lady Elizabeth, Mr. Santy, because I need her."

copped the wad, all right, all right, and I'm licked!"

Past him hurried the never-ending string of Christmas shoppers, parcel laden, sad at having been constrained to spend money, or sad because they had so little to spend. Now and then came those young in years and heart, filled with holiday joy, and laughing merrily, shopgirls and clerks mostly, accustomed to giving liberally and receiving niggardly, who gladly imparted to others where the best bargains might be had. "At Smith's you can get a perfectly grand doll for seven cents," or "Oh, I did want to buy that swell chain at Whiggs', but I didn't have thirty-nine cents left! Ain't it too bad?" and so on, their voices fluttering out on the crisp, winter air.

Skaggs got up with desperate grimness, and hurried away through Broadway to Fifth-ave., then straight up that lane of delight, without pausing to look at the magnificent shop windows, or to cast more than an angry glance at the policemen who patiently directed traffic

from their posts, holding up autocratic hands, or waving them to speed the stream along. He never faltered in his progress, nor loitered, until far up in the residence section, where dwelt the lordly plutocrats of the city. Here the houses were more isolated, as though disdainful to be jostled by their neighbors, and stood as if perpetually shrugging their shoulders at being compelled to associate with such. Gardens flanked them, where delicate trees slumbered in winter overcoats, and beds of precious plants were sheltered by roofs. Yet he thought not of that, knowing that a rare root in the ground could be sold for something, or envied by someone, while mere human things like men and women and little children were not objects of barter, envy, or care. No one on earth would have given a dollar for Skaggs, had he been displayed on a bargain counter and marked, "Six feet high. Exceptionally strong frame and splendidly muscled. Never betrayed a friend, and will prove faithful if given a chance."

Now he began to peer about him and to look for the glint of an arc light on a stray brass button. His step became slower, and unconsciously his lithe muscles lent themselves to a stealthy gait. He crossed the street and shrank into a gateway to stare at one of the miniature palaces across the street.

"That's it!" he said to himself. "That's the place I got into by claimin' to be the plumber. Parlors and drawin' rooms and dinin' rooms downstairs. Sleepin' rooms and lib'ries and such on second floor. Nussaries and more bunks on the third, and hired folks on top.

Biggins the Coal King. Got one kid, four hired girls that flirts, two chaffer boys that's out in the garage, one butler guy who lives in the house, and a doorman that smells of booze. That's it. Guess I'll take a look."

It was a house that he had selected some months before, at the time when he resolved that all he required was one more big haul, after which he would turn honest, and become a leading citizen, like poor old Blink Hawkins, dead and gone. He made his way cautiously round to the side of the building, and peeped through a grating in the basement upon a scene of "revelry by night" that filled him with envy. He could even hear the words of the merry company through the window ventilator which he stopped whirling by the deft application of a thumb.

"Have no fear," said the butler, unbent and seated at the head of a table on which were liberally spread choice wines purloined from a careless cellar. "Mawster and Missus is at the grand op'ry, and won't be home before midnight to tinker with the blawsted tree."

"And I offered to hang the things for 'em," declared a woman in a nurse's cap; "but they would only let me do the dirty work, such as stringing popcorn, and hooking tapers, and all that rubbish. 'Let's hang the little darling's things ourselves when we come home,' says the missus. As if they couldn't trust me!"

The other servants roared at her imitation of their mistress' voice, and the portly butler requested the footman to open another bottle of wine.

SKAGGS took a look above him, and then out at the garage in the rear, where all was dark. It was too much of a temptation. With his strong hands he leaped for a stone ledge above, with catlike agility threw up a foot, balanced like an equilibrist, and thrust his hard fingernails beneath a window. It gave readily; for the party below and the

general laxity of the season of good cheer favored him. He glanced with professional keenness out at the only point of the street from which he might be observed, discovered nothing alarming, and deftly slid the window higher and threw his body inside. This was to be a quick job. He must get anything handy and be away within a short time. In the dim light of the hall he saw the clock, a priceless antique, registering the hour of ten. Good! He would have at least a safe hour and a half, and that was a world of time.

But if any of his professional brethren had watched Skaggs they would have been horrified to have followed him; for he went directly and unfaltering, swiftly, silently, and true, to the nursery on the third floor. The door was open, and a light burned, even as the nurse had left it. He peered inside at the canopied bed, and his face relaxed a little as he looked down at a bright-haired child of not more than five years. Silk

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Milis said, meant to defend a claim for a thousand dollars. He didn't know what to do. And then he saw us and held up the train to get that ten dollars."

Winner of \$5 Prize

PATERSON'S SWEETHEART

By Frank P. White of Detroit

THE bus pulled up in front of the Goodlander in Fort Scott, and several of the boys who had run in to spend Sunday alighted. There were loud greetings between the newcomers and some of the fellows already there. They lined up along the counter, and as they registered each was handed his mail.

Paterson got several letters and one photograph envelop. He walked into an obscure corner of the room and, opening this envelop first, was seen to kiss the photo.

"Oh, Hi s'y! 'Arry, old chap, who is the new one? Let us see it too," said Billy Moore.

"Yes, come on, Pat!" echoed the rest of the bunch. "Don't be stingy. We all like to look at beauties, and we are willing to take your taste for granted, seeing that you have already tasted it."

Paterson got up, his face flushed, and resolutely put the photo behind him. "No, Boys," said he. "That is just a family pic-

ture, and would not be so interesting as you seem to think."

They looked at him doubtfully, and Moore burst out, "Hany hold time a family picture don't interest us is when there hane no more families, eh, Boys?"

"Sure thing," cried Turnbull.

"Me too!" said Harvey. "There is no chance for you to escape, old man; so come across and show us the new affinity."

"The Lord bless you!" growled King. "Show her to us, and we will give you an honest opinion, not tempered by any friendship, as to whether she is worthy of our Beau Brummell."

Paterson hesitated a moment, and a strange look came into his eyes. "Well, Boys, come over here, and all stand on one side of this table, so you may all see at once, and I'll show you the picture."

They silently obeyed, and when they were ranged along the table on each side of him Paterson drew the photograph from the envelop, and they saw a fair-faced woman of perhaps twenty-eight seated in a large chair. Kneeling at her feet was a three-year-old cherub, her hands clasped in prayer. Written on the lower part of the photograph were these words:

BABY'S NIGHTLY PRAYER

"Please, Dod, take dood care of our papa, and send him home to me soon!"

AND BY THESE DEEDS—

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incased her breast, pink ribbons held her silken sleeves, and silken coverlets, light as selected swansdown, protected her.

"Gee!" thought Bill Skaggs, "but that's the cleanest kid I ever see! Wonder if Mary Kathleen wouldn't have her backed off'n the boards if soap wasn't so high?"

He decided that Mary Kathleen would—proving that he was gifted with true discernment. But, after all, the heiress of the Coal King was a clean, sweet, healthy little girl, sound asleep, and thus lending herself, becoming as it were accessory, to the crime of Slick Bill. He slipped quickly across to the big cabinet that concealed the wall on one side and softly opened the doors. He grinned with delight and gasped in astonishment.

"If old Sandy Claus ever landed here," he muttered to himself, "he'd throw a fit and be bloomin' well ashamed of himself! The guy that comes here's got stuff that most of these Saint Nicks never thought of!"

Enraptured, he gazed upon unimagined things. Artists, sculptors, poets, inventors, scientists, sages, had all worked for little Miss Princess of Coal. The accumulated knowledge of the ages had been carried by an obsequious Saint Nicholas or a birthday fairy to her feet. That her father had once worked with his hands was forgotten by the gift bearers, who must have come, like gift bearers of old, offering these instead of precious stones and aloe and myrrh and sweet perfumes. Talents of gold had paid the price,—marvelous toy houses with mechanical dwellers that moved; model engines that looked as if they could run at the touch of a match; tiny automobiles in silver plate, with menials from the common ranks in livery; lifelike dolls that threatened to scream a warning that Slick Bill Skaggs, open mouthed and wide eyed, had come to steal them from this cupboard of delight. And Bill Skaggs, astounded, was nearly overcome by a childish desire to wind them all up at once, fire them all up at once, start them all going at once, to see what their accomplishments were. Of a sudden he almost leaped into the air.

OH! You are Mr. Santa Claus!" The Princess was awake, and screamed with joy in a sweet, childish treble.

"S-s-s-sh!" he warned her as soon as he could recover himself, and then slipped quietly across, and with the same caution closed the door. "Sure I am!" he said, fighting for silence.

"But," insisted the Princess, "I thought you had whiskers, long white ones."

"They ain't wearin' 'em now," he said in an apologetic tone; but through his own mind ran this desperate inquiry, "What in the deuce'll I do now? This kiddie'll give me away sure! It's a cinch!"

Outwardly he smiled, and his bushy black eyebrows were drawn into wide twin arches, and his heavy lips were opened, as he stepped toward the bed. Two men fought within him, the one crying aloud for a chance to escape, at no matter what cost, the other filled with a desire to be kindly, and to reassure this little child. The one suggested, with devilish insistence, the sudden clutch, the binding of the coverlet round the soft mouth and over the wide blue eyes, and retreat. The other whispered of how it would

feel to take her in his arms, and cuddle her down in the bed, and tell tales, even as he had told them to that other baby who had trustingly thrust her hand into his, a voiceless caress of approbation for his efforts. For a long, dread moment Slick Bill Skaggs, the burglar, stood there wavering, while the Princess of Coal, undaunted, smiled up at him and marveled that he should have become so changed.

"Listen, Kid!" he said, dropping to his knees by the side of the bed, a sure sign that the better spirit had won. "I'm hard up this year. Things ain't been comin' exactly right with your Uncle Sandy Claus in the last few hours. I ain't got no money to buy things for a bunch of poor kids I know, and I want 'em bad. You see, I told 'em I was comin', and they sort of expect me. I thought maybe you wouldn't mind—bein' as I never forgot you, nohow—if I just took back a lot of these things and gave 'em to them others that ain't got nothin', and never won't have unless I bring 'em."

THE blue eyes opened quite wide as the childish imagination worked. A white little hand crept from beneath the silken coverlet, and, to his vast abashment, patted Santa Claus' cheek. Two arms, silken clad and beribboned, swept up and clasped him round the neck and drew him close.

"I've kissed Santa Claus!" an awed voice whispered an instant later. "I have! I know it!"

Then, before he could forestall her action, the Princess had flipped out upon the floor, and waved a hand aloft.

"I can spare those up there, and those, and those," she said, pointing an eager finger. "But I hate to let you have some of them. Please don't take Lady Elizabeth, Mr. Santy, because you see I need her."

He put his hand on the most magnificent doll who said in a phonographic voice beneath the pressure of his thumb, "We will now sing 'I'm queen of the May,'" and he almost dropped it in fright.

"No, that's not her," reprimanded a scornful voice behind him. "She's back in the corner, Lady Elizabeth is. There!"

He lifted out a soiled, one-footed, gouge-eyed, armless, bedraggled lump, and handed it down to the yearning arms. "All right," he said gravely, "we won't take her along. We'll just make up a bundle of this other stuff. Wish some of it wa'n't so big. You see my pack's out on the street, on Fifth avenue, and—and the ain't no snow!"

"And the reindeers!" she asked, jumping around him as he laid his selections on the floor.

"Couldn't use 'em this year," he apologized. "Two of 'em's got spavins."

"That's too bad," she said, a little mystified, but endeavoring to be polite.

"This'll be hep for Mary Kathleen," he whispered, selecting a doll, "and I guess Pat'd like this," as he laid the marvelous engine on the floor. "Mebby Lou'd be tickled with this," as he scrutinized a toy nursemaid rocking a toy baby to sleep.

"Say, Mr. Santa Claus, dear Mr. Santa Claus," implored a voice by his side, "let me go with you and see Mary Kathleen, and Pat, and Lou! I do so want to go! I never can play with anyone when I want to. The

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nurse won't let me play with nice dirty little girls. Can't I go? Please! Please! Let me go! I'll come back home when you tell me to, and—and—"

He paused, perturbed, to look down at the pleading, childish face, and somehow the heart of him understood all the sorrows of her life. "I'd like to," he said, desperately striving to formulate an excuse, and selecting another hundred-dollar bauble as he talked; "but, you see—well—you see I've got a long way to go, and I may be gone a long time. In fact, I might get to do a two- or three-year bit for this, if anyone sees me," he added, with grim humor of his own.

She rushed frantically to a little side table, and when he looked around, terrified lest she had opened the door, she was fussing with her tiny garments, a chubby, rounded, pink little maiden, unabashed by Santa Claus. A spasm of pain clutched his heart. God! Why couldn't he have a child like that to pet and love? She seized a filmy thing with a tiny scream of delight, and waded into it, while he watched and tried to think of something to say that would not hurt her feelings.

"Nurse says I'm very smart," she jubilated. "I can most dress myself, 'cept for some buttons on the back."

He dived frantically for more toys. He must make some excuse. It came at last, when he found an old suitcase and stored it full, and some paper to wrap round the larger things to give them the appearance of Christmas purchases.

"You just go on dressin'," he said, "and you needn't be in no hurry. I got lots of time. I'll take these things downstairs, and—and tell the nurse you're goin' with me to give some presents to—let's play the little sisters of the poor," he added with an ironical touch. And she wondered why he paused at the very door to lay his bundles down, suddenly to reach over and lift her in his arms, and look with hungry eyes at her face, then to hug her closely to his breast, the little Princess of Coal.

"Take your time—no hurry," he said as he closed the door, and for the first time in his life was ashamed of a lie.

LIGHT footed, professional sneaker, wide leared, he slipped rapidly down the stairs to the hallway where the big clock stood. His safe hour and a half was almost gone! At any moment now the missing parents might return, at any moment the servants break up their party and pretend duty.

He looked through the hall door, and started back with a heavy scowl on his face. Leaning against the stone lion at the foot of the broad steps was a quiet figure in a helmet, the policeman on the beat, idling away his watch. Slick Bill estimated his chances. Cold sweat sprang to his forehead, cold tremors shook his body. The bristling hair rose beneath his cap, his great muscles stiffened in rebellion. He looked again at the clock, and thought of the window by which he had entered. He stole back along the hallway. Someone had locked the door!

For an instant he stood like a man at bay, a desperate, murderous, cornered animal, seeing beyond the bounds of vision the dreary march of convicts, warder, environed, with himself in the procession holding his hands on the shoulders of the man ahead, and supporting the weight of hands behind. He could have gnashed his teeth and shouted in an excess of desperation. He could have murdered to avoid the chance of the vision's realizations. He would have given a year of his life for a mere piece of lead pipe a foot long.

"You didn't come; so I—" a soft voice caused him to leap clean from the thickly carpeted floor.

"S-s-s-sh!" He repeated that warning whisper, and a desperate resolution seized him, as he grasped the only open chance. "I was comin' back for you," he whispered. "You see, we mustn't let anyone know. I'm sort of—well—remember! You're goin' to go with me to leave some presents. Let's play I'm the butler. The bulls—police, I mean—would want to talk to me, and I ain't got time if I give the kids presents tonight, because the's so many of 'em. Can you remember?"

"Yes," was her ecstatic assurance, and she danced up and down, each hop striking terror of discovery to his soul, and the hat she had found bobbing in time to his nerve throbs. He stooped and adjusted it and the sealskin coat that she had donned awry, then boldly opened the door, closed it gently after him, and descended the marble steps, staking everything, his liberty and all, on brazen nerve.

"Good evenin', Officer," he said to the policeman, who turned at the sound of their feet.

"Oh, the butler and I are going to give things to Mary Kathleen, and Lou, and Pat," shouted a childish voice, eager to impart the glad news—and the day was saved.

The Christmas spirit was winning its way; for the big policeman smiled down at the little face, glanced casually at Slick Bill, and grinned with sympathy as he turned away, saying, "Wish I could be home tonight givin' a present or two to a Pat of me own!"

Up the street they went, Santa Claus with his bundles and suitcase and the Princess of Coal, she chattering excitedly, he striving to quiet the beating of his heart, and wondering how he could find the excuse to put her in a taxicab and send her home. He saw one, two, and three pass him, and on this night they all seemed busy. Another passed them from whose open windows roared a rough song that made him scowl and mentally curse the roisterers; for was he not walking with the pure and innocent? And so block after block they trudged, until in desperation he too boarded a streetcar, hoping to find a cab or taxi farther down the island. Men and women smiled at him as he deposited his bundles and clung to the Princess' hand. And her Highness' eyes danced with delight at the oldest and finest intoxication in the world, the wine of adventure.

Now they were near the street of the tenement of five flights. He must do something! But how could he send her back? And all the time she whispered joyously to his ears her anticipations of Mary Kathleen and Lou and Pat. It would be like murdering the trust of a trusting soul to send her back alone. All right, she should see them, if only for a few minutes; then back she should go! This was the only way. He shut his big jaws grimly and lifted her from the car.

THERE have been for more than nineteen hundred years Santa Clauses who have brought a girdle of joy round this weary old world that whirls and whirls, heedless of space or time; but never was there one who did more than Slick Bill Skaggs on this merry Christmas Eve, five flights up, in a dingy room where the savor of cabbages and onions, of garlic and beans, clung like ghosts to environment. The Widow Callahan found them there at two o'clock in the morning, a man on the floor rapt in his inspection of a marvelous mechanical doll that could walk, sing, and talk, and four sleepy heads, close together in the commodious bed.

"What's this?" she demanded, as, puffing, she deposited her empty basket on the floor, and caught her lodger's sign of silence. She went to the bed and lifted the covers back and remarked, "The Saints preserve us!" as she saw that Patrick was closely hugging a strange young lady to his breast. How could she, the apple woman, know that her son held to his bosom a Princess of Coal?

"Kid I found in the street," lamely explained her lodger in a hoarse whisper. "Tried to send her home; but she bellered. I'll take her back in the morning or turn her loose and let her get run in. I wanted to—I says to her, says I—but say! You see she was lost, and she ain't quite sure where her maw is, and—"

"Lord bless her!" exclaimed the widow. "Sure she can stay here! And I didn't think you were the kind of a man that would send such a angel out into the night, Mr. Skaggs. Shame on ye for thinkin' of it! Get out, and leave the blessed thing to sleep!"

She doubled a finely developed fist to smite the offender, then discovered the toys, which Skaggs explained had been given to him by an old friend of his; after which, troubled in mind as to how he was to ship the Princess, he tiptoed up his creaking stairs as if fearful of arousing those below, and for a long time sat and smiled, as a Santa Claus should smile, or looked restlessly round, as a burglar should look. He went to bed with his clothes on so that he could relieve himself of the Princess at a very early hour; and somehow, even then, he hated the thought of letting her go.

AGAIN the room watched him, and a morning slit of sunlight shot across by his bed before he awoke, and then he leaped to his feet with a start, terror stricken because he had overslept himself. He rushed down the stairs and along the hallway to the front window, out of which he thrust his head, to see if the streets were alive and a policeman in sight; and then, at loud cries that came up to him from below, he drew back with the hunted look on his face.

"Extry! Extry! All about the kidnappin' of the millionaire's child!" the voices followed in through the window. The very enormity of stealing a child from its home on Christmas Eve had caused a sensation.

Standing there with the cries of his crime ringing up to him, he heard Christmas bells faintly chiming from the west and north, that part of the city where great choirs and great organs, priests and preachers, would reverentially celebrate the birthday of the One who loved little children. With dull persistence he worked it all out as he stood there. Fear of the law may have made him

less than logical; but he was convinced that through the policeman they had met the night before, and the Rogues' Gallery, the crime would be fastened on him before the day was over. He had not a dollar for flight. Perhaps the police were already searching for him. If not, and he slipped quietly to the street and away to hiding, they would find the Princess, and no one would believe the Widow Callahan innocent of participation. They would not even believe her true story, that she had not suspected her lodger to be one of the lawless; for they could never understand that he, Slick Bill Skaggs, delighted in having one spot on earth where he was considered an honest and hardworking night watchman. And Mary Kathleen and Lou and Pat would all go to some public orphanage, after the widow, innocent, had been sent away. It was awful!

He seemed to gather himself, his hands clenched, and his heavy jaws shut like rigid steel, as he turned and went directly downstairs and into the street. He walked to the dingy pharmacy on the corner, where there was a telephone booth, and his hands did not tremble, nor was there a tremor in his voice, as he called for the King of Coal. Anyhow, the bulls shouldn't have credit for a capture!

WHEN Biggins, the anxious King, and three detectives with guns in hand opened the door of Skaggs' room a half-hour later they found him sitting on the floor cuddling a child in braces who had been brought up for a holiday, while consulting him on many subjects were three very nice dirty little children and a large litter of expensive toys.

"Slick Bill, eh?" grated the first detective with a scowl. "Tryin' kidnappin'!"

"Yes," Bill said, "I done it. I'll go without any fuss. I'd like to take this kid downstairs first. She's hurted."

A detective walked in front and behind as he carried Mary Kathleen back to bed. "Now," he said, "maybe you'll let me go back to my room and get my cap and some pictures," and they snipped the handcuffs on him and led him up.

The Coal King had regained his equilibrium and was frowning at the toys. It reminded Slick Bill of something, and for the first time he appeared embarrassed.

"Boss," he said softly, leaning toward the millionaire; while the detectives held him back lest he do the great man harm, "it was me telephoned you where to come, and—and—I got a favor I want done for me. You see, I made all these kids believe I was Sandy Claus. I wish you'd let the Callahan kids keep them toys, because you see they'd be all busted up if you took 'em away from 'em. I guess they cost a lot, Boss; but I'm payin' pretty well, I am, about ten years of my life, considerin' my record. How about it?"

The Coal King looked at him queerly, and said, "All right."

"I am ready now," said Slick Bill to the detectives, and they turned toward the door.

But not so easily was he to part; for the Princess for the first time seemed to discern some great tragedy, and, crying, threw herself upon him.

"Father! Father!" she screamed in childish agony. "Don't let them! Don't let them! Help me! Help me! They're taking Santa Claus away! They're—"

Before the detectives anticipated his intent Slick Bill's great muscles tightened and flung them off, and he knelt to the floor and caught the Princess in his manacled arms, and held her to his breast, trying to pat and comfort her.

"It's all just funnin', Kiddie," he said, "just a make believe. I got to go now and see a lot of other folks."

He kissed her almost roughly, strained her for an instant in his arms, and released her, and the officers were astonished to observe when he stood up and faced the door that Slick Bill's eyes were filled with tears.

"Goodby, Lou! Goodby, Pat! Be a good boy! Merry Christmas!" he called over his shoulder from the doorway.

AND the officers were again astonished when, as the patrol wagon drove past a noble church where merry bells were clanging, Slick Bill, the burglar, smiled as if recalling some very happy recollections from some place left behind—very far behind!

Indeed, their astonishment was not ended, but merely begun; for they were surprised that the King of Coal came to Bill's cell, and had a long talk with him; were more than surprised when the King swore with mighty oaths that he would not prosecute, but would spend a hundred thousand for the prisoner's liberty; and were most surprised of all when Slick Bill Skaggs, ex-burglar, appeared one day as night watchman for the very home he had looted of toys and from which he had sauntered bravely forth with the Princess of Coal.